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ABSTRACT

Relocation of dual career families often translates into career advancement for the spouse whose job prospects initiate the move and career disruption for the spouse who follows. To describe the relocation concerns of men and women in dual career marriages, 32 professional couples were interviewed. Half the sample were black and half were white, and childless couples as well as parents were included. Results showed that a move was initiated by a job offer for the husband for 13 of the couples, by a job offer for the wife for 4 couples, and by offers for both spouses for 2 couples. Of the 13 wives who moved in response to their husband's job offer, 6 had difficulty finding work, 3 saw the move as emotionally uprooting, and 3 had no problems. Husbands did not always acknowledge the extent of the problems experienced by their wives. No differences attributed to race were found for job moves determined by husbands or wives, or in the degree of empathy for the dislocated spouse. The findings suggest that wives disproportionately experience disruption, and their husbands tend to lack empathy. (JAC)

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RELOCATION:
BLACK AND WHITE DUAL CAREER FAMILIES
ON THE MOVE

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One of the critical issues facing dual-career couples is a job offer, promotion, or transfer for one spouse, which presents the other with the prospect of an unsolicited geographic move (Fields & Erkut, 1983; Maynard & Zawacki, 1979). Relocation is often referred to as the nemesis of dual-career couples because there is no guarantee that the spouse who follows the partner with the job offer will be able to find work comparable to what she/he left behind. Relocation often translates into career advancement for the spouse whose job prospects initiate the move and career disruption for the spouse who follows. This is one of the major reasons why moving is an emotionally charged issue for couples, especially for those with a high degree of commitment to career goals (Hall & Hall, 1978).

The dual-career marriage challenges the traditional expectation that the wife will sacrifice her career ambitions to promote her husband's career. Yet, as in other aspects of the dual-career marriage, e.g. childrearing and housework where women continue to carry the bulk of the workload (Bryson, Bryson & Johnson, 1978; Pleck, 1978; Poloma & Garland, 1971; Yogev, 1981), this traditional expectation may still affect the way men and women in dual-career marriages handle a career-related move.

In this paper the relocation concerns and experiences of women and men in dual-career marriages, and their spouses' views of these issues are described. The basic questions explored are whether more wives experience hardship as a result of an unsolicited move than husbands do, and to what extent husbands and wives validate and empathize with their spouse's career-related problems following a move. We also looked at the effect, if any, that differences in

race had on the relocation experience.

METHOD

A convenience sample was composed of thirty-two dual-career couples (thirty-two female and thirty-two male professionals) all with a Bachelor's degree or more, half of whom were black and half white. The sample included childless couples, couples with preschool children, and couples with school-aged children. The number of years couples have been together was 5.6 for childless couples, 8.7 for couples with preschool children, and 18.5 for couples with school-aged children. Occupations included lawyers, health care professionals, engineers, managers and academicians.

The data were gathered by telephone interviews. Husbands and wives were interviewed separately. A semi-structured interview format was used. The interview schedule contained questions on the couple's relocation history in the last ten years. Offers which did not result in a move were discussed, as well as actual moves that took place. In each case we explored whose career (husband's or wife's) initiated the move and what happened to the other spouse's career if the move occurred. Respondents were asked whether the move caused conflicts. If the couple did not move, the reasons for this decision were discussed.

RESULTS

Of the thirty-two couples in the sample, nineteen couples (59 percent) reported moving in the last 10 years. In addition, five couples (16 percent) said they had turned down offers to move. Two of these were offers made to the husband, three were to the wife. Reasons for refusal varied: e.g. the

offer was in an unattractive area, the move would have upset spouse's career, or the move would have created instability in the family. Among those who moved, thirteen couples (68 percent) reported that the move was initiated by a job offer for the husband, four (21 percent) by a job offer for the wife, and two (11 percent) were initiated by offers for both spouses.

Of the thirteen wives who moved in response to a job offer for their husband, six said they had difficulty finding suitable work in the new location, three saw the move as emotionally uprooting, one reported logistical problems of moving, and three wives reported no problems or conflicts as a consequence of the relocation. Three-fourths of the women who followed their husbands (those who had difficulty finding work in the new location and those who saw the move as emotionally uprooting) reported substantial negative reactions to the move. The following three quotations are typical of the sentiments aroused by the move in these women:

> The biggest conflict was giving up my job. It was my first professional job that I liked very much. I'd seen myself being there a long time. There was room for me at the top in that organization and I had to give it up for the uncertainties of a competitive job search in the East. I grieved; I grieved for two months and got over it. But I am still in touch with people who supported me in my old place of work.

> Moves always cause conflicts. It is like uprooting a plant. It takes two years to get going again to establish roots. When I followed my husband, I had to drop all of my professional contacts which are so necessary for an artistic career. There was no place in the area where we moved that I could use my talents. I had a major setback. I am still living out a different set of events than I would have if I had not moved.

> We moved for my husband's job. It created such a trauma when I followed my husband West. I didn't want to go, but I didn't dare say so. I didn't want to interfere with his

> career. The most I could say was that I would have to come back East to visit. What bothered me most was I realized I'd been moved bodily to a place I did not want to go. I had no attachments there. I went only because I was his wife and a woman. I decided I would never be uprooted again and not say my mind.

The husbands of these women did not always acknowledge the extent of the problems experienced by their wives. Only one husband of a woman who had difficulty finding work said that this was a very trying experience for his wife. Similarly, only one husband fully acknowledged the disruption and emotional uprooting experienced by his wife. The others mentioned that their wives had some difficulty but their answers did not reflect full empathy with their wives. Finally, one husband whose wife had described her search for work as "horrible" because the computer skills she had developed in the job she left were not considered high enough by the company that offered her husband a job, appeared to be oblivious to her emotional turmoil. He said only, "At first she didn't look for work. When she did, then it was a matter of finding a job that paid well."

In the four cases where the move was initiated by a job offered to the wife, three husbands reported difficulty finding work in the new location. In two of the three cases, the wife's description of the husband's difficulty matched the sentiments expressed by the husband. Only in one case did the wife not report it as the traumatic event the husband described. He said it was a four- to five-month search in a very competitive field full of stress and strain. She reported merely that he had difficulty finding work, but after one to one-and-a-half months of looking he found a job he liked.

There were no differences by race on whether the move was initiated by

an offer to the husband or the wife, nor in empathy shown by spouses toward the wife/husband experiencing problems due to an unsolicited move. These issues were experienced by both black and white couples in a similar way. What we did find was that black couples had additional concerns which were not issues for whites.

In the case of black dual-career couples, their relocation problems included feelings of isolation because they moved to new work settings and communities that failed to, or were unable to, provide social support networks. This was more acutely felt by black families with children. As one black female with preschool children who lives in an isolated white surburb near her work put it,

> I am constantly looking for blacks. It is very important for my child to see other little black girls with braids in their hair.

Another black female parent of school-aged children lamented that the couple's heavy work and travel schedules do not leave much time for active involvement with the black community which resides outside of their predominantly white neighborhood. She added, "We miss the contact. This is increasingly a problem with our kids growing up."

When black dual-career couples considered accepting new positions and relocating their families, the risk of relocation was often compounded by the uncertainty of how viable a future there was for minorities in the new corporation/institution. As one black male said:

> Before you subject your wife and children to the trauma of moving, you need to know the institution's position regarding the advancement of blacks. Is it a firm corporate policy? Is it simply window dressing? Is it the revolving door type of treatment--several new ones

> in and out every few years? Is there a high-density concentration of blacks at only certain levels and no higher? Can an assistant become an associate, the head? Can a line manager become a general manager, a vice president, a president?

CONCLUSIONS

While the number of subjects in the study is too small to draw firm conclusions, the results do suggest that in dual-career marriages geographic moves are precipitated more often by a job offer to the husband than to the wife. Thus, it is the wives who disproportionately experience a disruption in their careers. Moreover, it appears that not as many husbands validate and express empathy for the emotional problems their spouses experience in working through the difficulties of an unsolicited move as do wives. Again, the numbers are too small to draw firm conclusions, but the husband's lack of full empathy can be interpreted within the context that even in the seemingly egalitarian arrangements of dual-career marriages between two college-educated professionals, the wife's career is viewed as less important than the husband's. These data were gathered in 1982, almost two decades after the beginning of the women's movement (the publication in 1963 of Friedan's Feminine Mystique) and more than a decade after the beginning of scholarly work on dual-career families (the publication in 1969 of the Rapoports' study of the dual-career family). Apparently, it is going to take more time and perhaps some structural changes in the organization of work and family before the value of men's and women's careers achieves parity.

An alternative interpretation of the results obtained which show men to care less about the disruptive effects of moves on their wives' careers

may be that men, on the average, are less empathic than women. Whereas such a personality-based interpretation is tempting, there is no clear-cut evidence to suggest that sex differences in empathy exist (see Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974). An interpretation stressing the relatively higher value attached to men's careers than to women's remains the more plausible explanation for these results.

Regarding race differences, in this select group of professionals no differences which can be attributed to race were observed in determining whether the move will be precipitated by an offer to the husband or to the wife, nor in the degree of the husband's or wife's empathy for the dislocated spouse. We did observe, however, that black dual-career couples were concerned with social/cultural isolation in response to a job offer in a new location. Also, before they uprooted their family, black dual-career couples wanted to know whether the job offer was just so much affirmative action window dressing or a promise that could be trusted to carve out a career for themselves in the new company.

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